

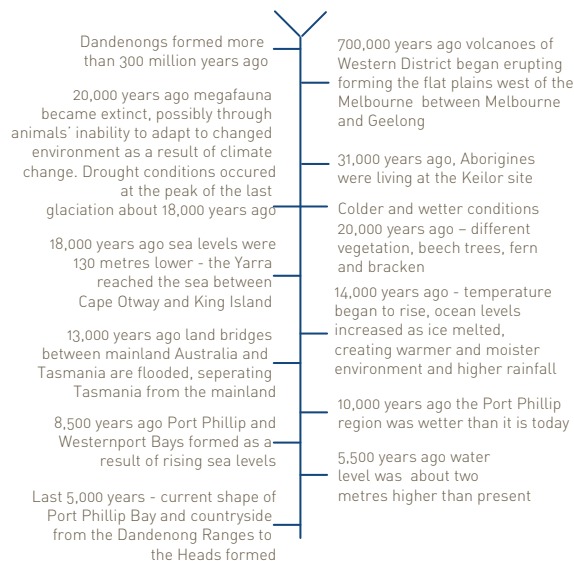
Aboriginal people

The Port Phillip Region

The Port Phillip region has been inhabited for more than 30,000 years. Over many generations, local Aboriginal people learned to live with significant shifts in their landscape, environment and climate. Indigenous people also influenced change in the environment through using fire and introducing dingoes. Fire was used to clear parts of the land, allowing for easy travel and fostering new growth which in turn attracted game. Over time (perhaps thousands of years) some plants adapted to periodic firing and became the most common or dominant species.

The Port Phillip region was known to the Koori people of south east Australia for its source of greenstone axes, which were traded up to 700 kilometres away, at Wilamimurring (Mt William, near Lancefield).

1 Port Phillip region timeline to 1800

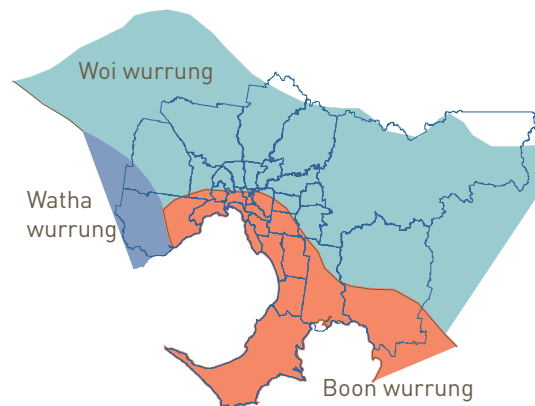


Aboriginal communities and languages

At the time of European settlement, five related communities collectively known as the Kulin nation owned two million hectares of what is now known as south central Victoria. The five communities are known as: Woi wurrung (Wurundjeri) of Birrarung (Yarra) catchment; Boonerwung of bays and south coast; Taungurung of Koriella catchment (Goulburn River); Wathaurung of Western Plains; Dja Dja Wrung of the north west region (Loddon River).

Three of Victoria's 36 Aboriginal language areas border the Port Phillip region. They are Woi wurrung, Watha wurrung and Boon wurrung (also known as Boonerwung). These Aboriginal language areas were identified by Clark in 1996 and differ to some extent from earlier work by Tindale and others. They also differ from community boundaries for contemporary Victorian Aboriginal organisations.

2 Aboriginal language areas in Melbourne area, as identified by Clark (1996)



Aboriginal people and early settler contact

George Langhorne was commissioned in 1837 to establish a mission station in what is now South Yarra, to 'civilise' the Indigenous people and protect them from white settlers. This was replaced by the Aboriginal Protectorate in 1839 following several conflicts between Aboriginal people and squatters around Mount Macedon (Presland, 2001).

An early 'formal' cultural contact between local clans and white settlers was recorded in March 1839 when around 400 to 500 Aboriginal people were brought together in what is now Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens for a welcoming party for the Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson. The government provided food and blankets and the Indigenous people presented a display of dancing.

Aboriginal people and settlers also had early contact along the coast. Early contact between the Boonerwung people and sealers involved the kidnapping and removal of Boonerwung women to Bass Strait islands.

3 The Westernport District 1840, map by Assistant Protector Thomas

